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Sent: Mon 9/14/2015 11:57:24 AM
Subject: Fwd: McCarthy to be grilled in both House and Senate over Colorado spill

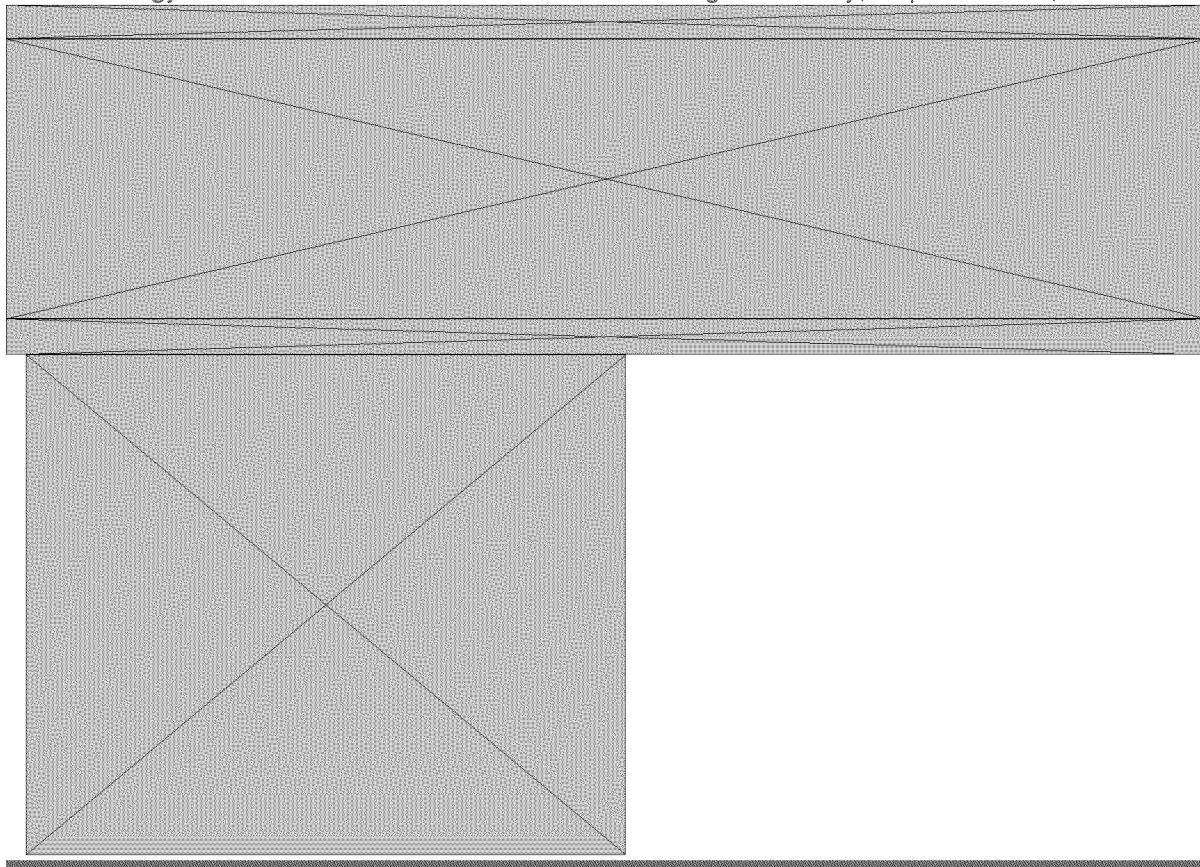
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Energy and environment headlines for the morning of Monday, September 14, 2015



McCarthy to be grilled in both House and Senate over Colorado spill

By Kevin Rogers

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy this week will face down Republican detractors in both chamber of Congress as she prepares to testify on the Aug. 5 spill of three million gallons of mine wastewater into Colorado's Animas River.

Last month's incident came as EPA personnel and the contractor Environmental Restoration U.C. were investigating water buildup at the abandoned Gold King Mine near Silverton, Colorado. An excavation attempt went awry, opening a breach that fouled the river.

Republicans have seized upon the incident, accusing the agency of missing warning signs of a blowout potential at the mine and criticizing the agency's response as too slow when it came to alerting nearby communities.

On Wednesday, McCarthy will face the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, led by Chairman Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., a leading critic of the agency and McCarthy.

"It is important for this committee, the agency, and the public to know what exactly went wrong leading up to Aug. 5 and in the days that followed," he said in a statement. "As EPA continues to oversee closed and abandoned mine cleanup across the nation, the EPA will be heavily questioned about this historic event and to how it will ensure this does not happen again."

The next day, McCarthy will be challenged at a joint hearing of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee and the House Natural Resources Committee. She'll be joined there by Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, whose department is conducting an independent review of the spill.

That move prompted the panels' leaders to express concern. In an Aug. 31 letter to McCarthy, Oversight Chairman Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, Natural Resources Chairman Rep. Rob Bishop, R-Utah, and subcommittee Chair Rep. Cynthia Lummis, R-Wyo., suggested that Interior wouldn't be able to provide an objective review of the incident.

"The decision to assign that job to another Executive Branch agency raises concerns that the reviewers are not sufficiently independent or comprehensive in their scope of review and therefore susceptible to political influence and other considerations," the chairmen wrote.

Bishop's committee will be in New Orleans on Tuesday for a hearing focused on the Interior Department and Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement's proposed offshore blowout preventer rule, which Republicans say could have disastrous effects on offshore energy production.

"If finalized as written, the well control rule could cause a second moratorium in the Gulf," Julia Slingsby, the committee's press secretary said in an email. She said the hearing would also delve into efforts to lift the Commerce Department's crude oil export ban.

The committee will hear testimony from Louisiana Sens. Bill Cassidy and David Vitter, both Republicans, BSEE Gulf of Mexico Regional Director Lars Herbst and oil and gas industry representatives.

Other congressional committees plan to discuss environmental issues this week.

On Wednesday, the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy will continue its oversight hearing into the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, which governs the nation's Superfund management programs.

And on Thursday, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee will discuss a bill that would reauthorize and update the Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act. The law allows the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service to charge fees at campgrounds and day-use sites with certain amenities.

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Upcoming Events

After spill, work suspended at 10 mine sites

By Matthew Brown and Dan Elliott

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Site investigations and some cleanup work at 10 polluted mining complexes in four states were suspended because of conditions similar to those that led to a massive wastewater blowout from an inactive Colorado gold mine, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials said.

The sites include three in California, four in Colorado, two in Montana and one in Missouri, according to details obtained by The Associated Press following repeated requests for the information.

They have the potential for contaminated water to build up inside mine workings, EPA Assistant Administrator Mathy Stanislaus said. That would set the stage for a possible spill such as last month's near Silverton, Colorado, where an EPA team triggered a 3 million gallon blowout of toxic sludge while doing excavation work on the inactive Gold King Mine.

The accident fouled rivers in three states and attracted harsh criticism of the EPA for not being prepared despite prior warnings that such a spill could happen.

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Survey: US gasoline price drops 27 cents over 3 weeks

By The Associated Press

CAMARILLO, Calif. (AP) — The U.S. average price of gasoline dropped 27 cents over the past three weeks, to \$2.44 a gallon.

Industry analyst Trilby Lundberg said Sunday that the pump price fell even though crude oil prices gained strength, as gasoline supply outweighed demand.

Further price drops are likely if crude oil prices don't skyrocket, because the Sept. 15 change to winter grade gasoline comes with a cost cut in much of the country.

The cheapest price recorded in the continental United States was Charleston, South Carolina, at \$1.94. The highest was \$3.31 a gallon in Los Angeles.

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Months before oil spill, signs of poor record-keeping found

By Brian Melley and Michael R. Blood

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The pipeline company responsible for an oil spill that blackened California beaches kept shoddy records on emergency training and how it would protect pristine coastline in the event of a break, federal regulators said Friday.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration proposed six violations from inspections begun in 2013 — some 20 months before the May pipeline rupture near Santa Barbara — but imposed no fines.

Among the findings, the agency said Texas-based Plains All American Pipeline failed to properly document pressure tests on tanks and failed to keep adequate records on how it would prevent spills in sensitive environmental areas, or respond if one did occur.

The agency said the findings identify areas where the company should improve safety throughout its sprawling pipeline system.

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Conservationists push for Atlantic's 1st national monument

By Jennifer McDermott

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Undersea ravines deeper than the Grand Canyon, submerged mountains rising thousands of feet from the ocean floor and forests of kelp and coral would become the first marine national monument in the Atlantic if conservationists have their way.

The proposal to protect a pristine ecosystem undamaged by heavy fishing and pollution in the Gulf of Maine and canyons and peaks off Cape Cod — where vivid coral has grown to the size of small trees over thousands of years — would mirror the massive conservation efforts that have already taken place in the Pacific Ocean.

"We have an opportunity to permanently protect two of our nation's greatest ocean treasures, right off our coast," said Priscilla Brooks, the Conservation Law Foundation's director of ocean conservation.

Environmental groups want President Barack Obama to permanently protect Cashes Ledge, the underwater mountain and offshore ecosystem in the Gulf of Maine, and the New England Coral Canyons and Seamounts, the chain of undersea formations about 150 miles off the coast of Massachusetts.

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California lawmakers tackle climate, marijuana, and in dying

By Judy Lin and Juliet Williams

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California lawmakers counted far-reaching climate change legislation, statewide medical marijuana regulation and a deeply emotional measure allowing patients to legally end their own lives among the hundreds of bills approved before a legislative session.

But they also left unfinished many of the thorniest challenges of the year as they wrapped up early Saturday.

The Legislature failed to address a \$59 billion backlog in highway, bridge and road repairs; did not come up with a solution for how to pay for the state's health care program for the poor, and left fees on polluters and tobacco regulations untouched.

Democratic Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de Leon of Los Angeles hailed the historic

climate package and noted that lawmakers have another year remaining to accomplish many of their outstanding goals.

A message from the American Petroleum Institute

America is now the world's #1 natural gas producer and will soon be #1 in oil. Now more than ever, abundant energy means abundant prosperity, opportunity and security for all Americans.

[Learn more at EnergyTomorrow.org](http://EnergyTomorrow.org)

All-out Obama effort to unite Democrats clinched Iran deal

By Erica Werner and Julie Pace

WASHINGTON (AP) — A lame-duck president, an empowered opposition, a looming election: They're hardly the ingredients for a resounding White House triumph.

Yet President Barack Obama clinched a huge victory on the Iran nuclear deal in Congress last week when Senate Democrats blocked GOP attempts to get a disapproval resolution to his desk and frustrated House Republicans settled for passing two related measures destined to go nowhere.

The outcome was especially notable for a White House with a history of bungling legislative initiatives on Capitol Hill, and a president known for a hands-off relationship with lawmakers, even his own Democrats.

This time was different, according to administration officials and lawmakers of both parties. The reasons involved policy, politics and a president looking for one last big success to burnish his foreign policy legacy.

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As wildfires rage in West, ranchers lose cattle, rangeland

By Gosia Wozniacka

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — For weeks, rancher Darrel Holliday has rounded up frightened cows and calves off the smoldering hills of the Strawberry Mountain Range, a wilderness area in eastern Oregon of old-growth forest and grass where wildlife and cattle roamed.

Holliday's entire federal forest grazing allotment of about 32,000 acres — 50 square miles —

burned last month as a wildfire ravaged the area. The land is now a smoke-filled expanse of blackened tree sticks and ash a foot and half deep.

"We're picking up cows that should have calves with no calves. We assume they might have died out there," said Holliday, who is still missing 22 of his 180 cow-calf pairs. He's among dozens of ranchers similarly wrestling with the loss of animals and grazing land in a region where cattle production is one of the leading agricultural industries.

The vast majority of the 1.6 million acres — nearly 2,600 square miles — that burned in Oregon, Idaho and Washington this year are federally owned, data show, with large swaths of that public land used as rangeland for livestock grazing.

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Scientists expect Hawaii's worst coral bleaching ever

By Audrey McAvoy

HONOLULU (AP) — Warmer-than-normal ocean temperatures around Hawaii this year will likely lead to the worst coral bleaching the islands have ever seen, scientists said Friday.

Many corals are only just recovering from last year's bleaching, which occurs when warm waters prompt coral to expel the algae they rely on for food, said Ruth Gates, the director of the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology. The phenomenon is called bleaching because coral lose their color when they push out algae.

The island chain experienced a mass bleaching event in 1996, and another one last year. This year, ocean temperatures around Hawaii are about 3 to 6 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than normal, said Chris Brenchley, meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Honolulu.

Bleaching makes coral more susceptible to disease and increases the risk they will die. This is a troubling for fish and other species that spawn and live in coral reefs. It's also a concern for Hawaii's tourism-dependent economy because many travelers come to the islands to enjoy marine life.

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China issues blueprint for state industry overhaul

By Joe McDonald

BEIJING (AP) — China's Communist Party has issued a long-awaited blueprint for overhauling bloated state industries that would retain the party's dominance in the economy.

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The plan comes at a time when the government of President Xi Jinping is under pressure to reverse an economic slowdown and reduce reliance on trade and investment to drive growth. Communist leaders have promised to give entrepreneurs and market forces a bigger role but insist state ownership will remain the core of the economy.

Despite three decades of market-oriented reform, most of China's industries are dominated or entirely controlled by state companies. That includes oil and gas, coal mining, steel production, banking, insurance, air travel, and telecoms.

The plan issued late Sunday reflects the complex path the party walks in trying to develop the world's second-largest economy while preserving its monopoly on power.

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Thai villagers say gas drilling sickens them, ruins crops

By Ted Andersen and Nattasuda Anusondisai

BANGKOK (AP) — More than 100 students and villagers crowded into a northeast Thailand college forum to hear about American gas companies conducting drilling operations in their region. A lieutenant colonel and dozens of soldiers and police officers followed them in.

The armed police began photographing members of the crowd, a menacing move in a country now run by a military junta that bars protests and routinely cracks down on dissenters. Some in the audience had already viewed the military as part of the problem, since months earlier they had forced demonstrators to make way for drilling equipment.

"With soldiers in the meeting room we were scared because we could not criticize the state officers who protect the company," said Chainarong Sretthachau, a professor who organized the May event at Mahasarakham University. "If I did not agree, they would not allow us to organize the conference."

Villagers in the northeast provinces of Udon Thani, Khon Kaen and Kalasin are trying to stop the drilling operations by American company APICO and its subsidiary Tatex Thailand.

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Police in Armenia break up protest against electricity hikes

By The Associated Press

YEREVAN, Armenia (AP) — Police in Armenia dispersed a protest against electricity price hikes that was blocking a central avenue in the capital, Yerevan.

Several thousand demonstrators rallied Friday night, reigniting a two-week-long protest that was the most serious unrest the former Soviet nation had seen in years.

But early Saturday police unblocked the avenue. Police spokesman Ashot Agaronyan said 48 protesters who refused to disperse were detained, but were soon released.

The initial protests fizzled in early July after the government suspended the electricity rate increases. The demonstrators continue to demand that they be annulled entirely.

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Week in Review – House Panel Oks Lifting Oil Export Ban

Gasoline Consumption Measure Fails in California.

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BOEM to hold another Gulf lease auction

Despite an anemic response to its last offshore lease auction because of declining oil prices, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management is planning a new auction to be held in New Orleans in March that will offer rights to 40 million acres in the Gulf of Mexico, The Hill reports.

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Paris climate conference to start with gathering of world leaders

Climate experts are applauding the French move to bring world leaders in at the start of this year's UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, rather than at the end, National Journal reports.

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PJM capacity auction saves Quad Cities nuke plant, for now

Exelon's Quad Cities nuclear plant has cleared the PJM Interconnection capacity auction for 2017-18, although the disclosure may blunt the utility's drive for legislation in Illinois to give its nuclear fleet a revenue boost, E&E reports.

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Low prices entice Texas coop into power market

The Pedernales Electric Cooperative says buying more power on the Electric Reliability Council of Texas wholesale markets may make more financial sense given the present level of prices, Platts reports.

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Oil pressured by China data

Chinese factory output data that fell short of analysts' expectations pressured oil prices early Monday, ahead of a Federal Reserve decision on interest rates later in the week. U.S. benchmark crude was flat at \$44.63 a barrel in electronic trading on the Nymex, while in London Brent dropped 38 cents to \$47.76, Reuters reports.

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Fight over coal subsidies looms over OECD talks

France says it's planning to stop coal export credits, ahead of negotiations on the issue set for a Thursday session to be held by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Reuters reports.

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Criticism for study that found historically fewer severe forest fires

A study published in PLOS ONE last week, which said Forest Service efforts to blunt burning intensity presented a problem for ecosystems, is being criticized by scientists and an official from the Nature Conservancy, E&E reports.

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Efficiency regs won't block log cabin construction: Official

A Missoula County advisor has told worried log home builders in Montana that there's enough flexibility in new federal building efficiency standards to enable them to carry on with construction, the Missoulian reports.

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Brown drought policy gets voter backing: Poll

Voters surveyed in a USC Dornsife/Los Angeles Times poll found support for California Gov. Jerry Brown's policies for handling the state's drought, and opposition to easing environmental protections to open up more water supplies.

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Burning all fossil fuels would melt all Antarctic ice: Study

A study published in the journal *Science Advances* predicts that if all of the world's coal, oil and natural gas deposits were burned, the Antarctic ice sheet would completely melt and sea levels would rise more than 160 feet, *The New York Times* reports.

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